either awarded lesser years of imprisonment and High Courts have even reduced the sentences in such cases; and

(b) if so, whether Government would ensure that maximum punishment, as provided in the law, be awarded in proven cases to deter the prospective perpetrators of this heinous crime?

THE MINISTER OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI H. R. BHARDWAJ): (a) Section 376 of Indian Penal Code (IPC) prescribes a punishment of a minimum period of seven years of imprisonment and a maximum punishment of life imprisonment for the offence of rape. However, in a few serious cases of rapes like rape of a girl below 12 years of age and custodial rape, the minimum punishment could be 10 years. As per proviso to the above Section, the court may, for adequate and special reasons to be mentioned in the judgement, impose a sentence of imprisonment for a term less than seven years.

(b) As the judiciary is independent, it is not possible for the Government to interfere in the functioning of the judiciary.

Centres for Certificate Authentication

*71. SHRI T. T. V. DHINAKARAN: Will the Minister of HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) the locations of the centres where authentication of certificates of educational qualifications for the persons seeking employment in Arabian countries is being done in the country;

(b) whether Government are aware of the hardships faced by the persons coming from distant places to New Delhi for this purpose; and

(c) whether Government would open more authentication centres in the country to save the job seekers from the ordeal of long travel?

THE MINISTER OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (SHRI ARJUN SINGH): (a) to (c) Authentication of Educational Certificates is being done at New Delhi by the Ministry of Human Resource Development. In addition, in view of the hardship faced by people coming from distant places to New Delhi for authentication, the following fourteen State Governments have also been authorized to authenticate educational

certificates of their respective States, in consultation with Ministry of External Affairs:—

1. Kerala
2. Karnataka
3. Andhra Pradesh
4. Maharashtra
5. Tamil Nadu
6. Uttar Pradesh
7. Bihar
8. Madhya Pradesh
9. Haryana
10. Rajasthan
11. Punjab
12. West Bengal
13. Gujarat and
14. Jammu & Kashmir

As per available information, the following seven State Governments are running authentication centres in pursuance of the above authorization, at places shown against their names, below:—

Sl. No.	Name of the State	Place(s) where centres is/are functioning
1.	Kerala	Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi and Kozhikode
2.	Andhra pradesh	Hyderabad
3.	Karnataka	Bangalore
4.	Tamil Nadu	Chennai
5.	Maharashtra	Mumbai
6.	Punjab	Chandigarh
7.	West Bengal	Kolkata

As a result of authentication centres in States becoming functional, the persons coming to Delhi for authentication has come down considerably.